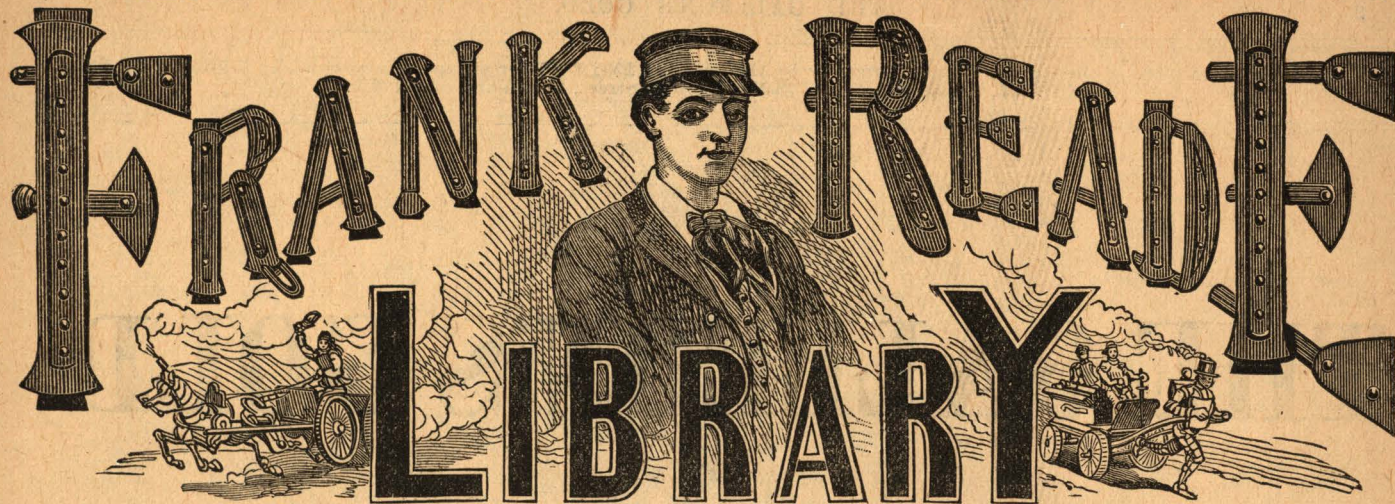


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THE GALLEON'S GOLD; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Deep Sea Search.

By "NONAME."



And in its sickening glare the scene which was enacted was enough to freeze the blood in the veins of any ordinary man. "My soul!" he gasped, and he threw up his arms. From every corner of the cabin there rushed toward him ghastly stiffened human bodies, corpses of men who had been dead for two centuries. Could he believe his senses.

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THE GALLEON'S GOLD;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Deep Sea Search.

A Submarine Story of the Sunken Buccaneers.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Mysterious Mirage," "The Underground Sea," "To the End of the Earth in an Air-Ship," "Lost in the Great Undertow," "The Chase of a Comet," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUNKEN TREASURE.

THE clipper ship Aurelian, one of the few survivors of the old West India trade, had sighted Sandy Hook, and was making New York harbor after a remarkable voyage from Belize.

Captain Hartley, her master, was eagerly watching the approaches to the harbor with his deck glass.

By his side stood a man of distinguished appearance.

He was tall, sinewy, and would have been considered handsome were it not for the yellow hue of skin which all travelers in tropical climes are bound to acquire.

Cecil Clifford had traveled the world over. His hobby was archaeology, and as he was a man of large means and a member of many historical and scientific societies, he was able to pursue his researches to any extent.

He was the only passenger aboard the Aurelian, and was returning to New York from Honduras with a thrilling purpose in view.

What this purpose was only he and Captain Hartley knew.

"I only hope that Mr. Parker received our cable from Havana, and will be at the wharf to meet us," remarked Captain Hartley.

"So do I," agreed Clifford. "Is it not possible that he will come down to meet us in a tug?"

The captain shook his head with a wry face.

"Humph!" he said; "you do not know Gilbert Parker. He is the most penurious man in America. Do you think he would put out the money to employ a tug? Depend upon it—never!"

"Yet our cablegram may excite his cupidity. Did you not specify that it was a matter of moment, involving perhaps millions?"

"I did, but I do not fancy he would heed that. He is a very close, snug man of business, this Gilbert Parker. The Aurelian is all the property he owns in the world and every cent of profit she turns him in from her voyages, he with miserly proclivity stores away."

Cecil Clifford's face wore a most determined expression.

"Very well," he said, resolutely. "If Mr. Parker does not see fit to lend the Aurelian for my purpose, I will buy, charter or build a vessel of my own!"

Captain Hartley turned eagerly about.

"If you do that," he said with some excitement, "why may I not enter your service?"

"And leave Parker?"

The captain snapped his fingers.

"The old skinflint has no love for me and vice versa," he said.

"I have sailed the Aurelian for him eight years and made a mint of money for him. Yet he would not yield me a bit of sympathy or help were I in trouble or distress. You cannot blame me!"

"Under such circumstances, no," replied Clifford. "And Hartley, it shall be so. You stand by me and I will by you."

"It is agreed."

They gripped hands.

"You have faith in our enterprise?"

"I have."

At this moment the first mate called down from the ship's bridge: "There is a small tug over yonder making signals to us, skipper!"

Hartley started forward.

"A tug!" he cried. "Answer them at once! Can it be possible that it is Parker coming to meet us?"

"By Jove, I hope that is true!" cried Clifford heartily.

"If so," said the captain, "he has very radically departed from all previous custom."

The tug which had signaled the Aurelian now drew momentarily nearer.

Soon she was within hailing distance, and among her company the angular form of the owner of the Aurelian was seen.

The ship lay to and the tug ran alongside. The owner came up the gangway somewhat hastily.

"Ah, Hartley!" he said, in a brusque sort of way, "you have brought my ship home safely once more!"

"I think I may claim that, Mr. Parker," replied the captain.

"Has the voyage been successful?"

"The best yet made!"

"Ah! that is good," declared Parker, rubbing his dry little hands while his eyes glittered like beads. "You are very shrewd, Hartley, and I will admit, faithful. I have gone to some expense to come out here and meet you. That I will charge to the deficit account. I am anxious to know the meaning of your cablegram!"

"You shall know it at once!" replied the captain. "Come into the cabin. But first, allow me, Mr. Parker, my friend, Cecil Clifford."

Parker bowed in a perfunctory way, and Clifford said:

"Very much pleased!"

Then a few moments later they were seated in the cabin at a big table spread with charts.

Hartley opened the conversation.

"I will first tell you a bit of a story, Mr. Parker," he said; "it will help to explain matters."

"Proceed!" said Parker, stiffly.

"As I must first inform you," continued the captain, "Mr. Clifford here is an antiquarian and traveler. He was some few weeks ago engaged in exploring the interior of Honduras. In the mountains he found the ruined city of an ancient race. In exploring the ruins he found a secret chamber which was completely walled up, save for one small opening large enough to put a hand through."

"In this secret chamber there was a skeleton enclosed in fragments of armor, such as was worn by the soldiers of Spain in the sixteenth century."

"Here was a mystery, and he at once set himself at work to solve it. His first assumption was that it was the remains of one of the early Spanish invaders, who had been made a prisoner by the natives and shut up here to starve to death."

"And upon the walls of the death cell he found the following scratched in barely legible characters into the stone:

"I, Don Cristobal Mendoza, am thrown into this dungeon to starve by the heathen, curses upon them! Curses upon the fortune which placed me in their power.

"Here I am doomed to die, while my ship, the Donna Veneta, lies fathoms deep in the ocean, off this cursed coast, with all my great fortune aboard.

"Woe is the day I left sunny Spain with my princely holdings, to set up a kingdom in this land of deception and disappointment. Buried at the bottom of the sea is my noble ship and millions of pesos, while I am to die in this fearful hole. Jesu pity! Save my soul!"

"Then followed a diagram which was rudely drawn to show the spot where the Donna Veneta went down. The whole coast map of Honduras was shown, and so comprehensive was it that a skipper familiar with the waters should be able to sail directly to it.

"No latitude or longitude was given, only approximate distances, but this was deemed enough."

The diagram was briefly discussed. All the while Parker had listened with a cat-like gleam in his eyes.

"Well, Mr. Parker," said Hartley, finally, "what do you think of it? Is not that treasure worth recovering?"

"Recovering?" exclaimed the miser, squeakily; "how can it be recovered? How can you recover anything from such a depth in the sea as that?"

"Pshaw! There are hundreds of divers who will go down to the wreck."

"If they can find it."

"You are incredulous!"

"What do you want of me? Is this your reason for calling me out here at such trouble and expense?" cried the miser, angrily. "What a bit of moonshine! You are a fool, Hartley. I gave you credit for more sense. What folly to think that you could recover such a treasure. Why, it is absurd—very absurd, sir!"

For a moment Hartley's face was black. Hot words were on his tongue, but he only said, in a steely way:

"Then you have no faith in this project?"

"None whatever!"

"You will not lend the Aurelian to this scheme on promise of an equal division?"

"Never!"

The miser spoke decidedly; Hartley arose quickly to his feet. He was very resolute and very angry.

"Then, Mr. Parker," he said; "you may look for a new captain. I am out of your employ this moment."

Parker gave a violent start.

"What!" he cried, "have I not always paid you well?"

"Never without reluctance."

"Then you mean to leave me?"

"I do."

"What will you do? You have no ship nor enough of money to carry out your hare-brained enterprise."

"But my friend, Mr. Clifford, has," replied Hartley, coolly.

The miser turned and regarded Clifford almost insolently.

"Yes," said the traveler, with assumed nonchalance. "You have chosen to throw away your golden opportunity, Mr. Parker. We are not sorry, however, to exclude you from our enterprise. It is true that I have money enough to build, buy or charter any kind of a vessel we may desire to accomplish our purpose."

The miser looked keenly at Clifford and then stammered:

"But—I—I will reconsider—"

"No you won't," said Clifford emphatically. "We are alone in this enterprise, sir. You are excluded!"

The miser said no more. But he chuckled much under his breath. The Aurelian a few hours later was at her wharf.

Then Captain Hartley and the distinguished traveler took their leave of the vessel. The captain took the portfolio in which he had kept the copy of Don Cristobal's story, among other effects.

Both proceeded at once to a hotel. Neither were disconcerted by the decision of Parker.

"The Aurelian is a good vessel," said Hartley, "but there are others, Clifford. I am not sorry to leave the old curmudgeon out of it."

"Nor I," agreed Clifford; "but now, my dear friend, let us at once get down to business."

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG INVENTOR.

CLIFFORD'S plan was to buy diving-suits, and at once look up men used to descending into the greatest depths of the sea.

But these were not easily found. Neither were they at once successful in finding the right sort of a sailing craft.

While thus somewhat perplexed a curious incident occurred which completely changed their plans.

Clifford chanced to pick up a newspaper and read a large heading:

"A WONDERFUL INVENTION!"

"Frank Reade, Jr., the young inventor, once more to the fore. This time it is a famous submarine boat which is a complete success, and with which the wonderful young man intends to sail around the world under water. The problem of deep sea navigation solved. The naval and marine world in general much interested."

More followed of a descriptive nature, and Clifford read every line. Then he drew a deep breath.

He arose and put on his hat.

"Hartley," he said, "Come with me."

The manner of the great traveller impressed the captain. He looked up in surprise and asked:

"Where?"

"I am going to Readestown."

"To Readestown?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To see Frank Reade, Jr."

"What—"

"Ask no questions until we get there. Then you will understand all. Come along!"

Hartley knew there was no use in trying to argue the point. It was always best to give Clifford his own way. So he followed him.

Readestown was a neat little town on a river leading down to the sea. It was chiefly noted for the family of great inventors, the Reades, who had founded the place.

Frank Reade, Jr., himself sat in his private office at the machine works looking over some plans.

He was a tall, handsome youth, with a certain bearing which distinguished him wherever he went.

Suddenly the door opened and a woolly head appeared in the space between the door and the frame.

A negro, black as a coal and with gleaming ivories stood there.

"Well, Pomp," said Frank, locking up, "what is it?"

"Suah, sah, two gentlemen as wants fo' to see yo', sah. Dey won't take no, sah!"

Frank took the cards handed him and glanced at the names.

"JOSEPH HARTLEY."

"CECIL CLIFFORD."

New York City.

"I don't know them," he said. "What is their business?"

"Berry important, sah, so dey say. Kain't tell no mo'."

"Show them in."

"A'right, sah."

Pomp disappeared, but he had no sooner vanished, than a shock of red hair and a genial Irish mug appeared in the spot he had left.

"Shure, Misther Frank, ivery bit av the shores is aboard the boat, sor."

"Good for you, Barney O'Sheal!" replied the young inventor. Everything is then in readiness for the start."

"Yis, sor."

"Very well, that will do."

The red hair and grinning mug then vanished.

Barney and Pomp were Frank Reade, Jr.'s faithful body servants. They had been long in his employ.

Steps were heard outside a few moments later, and two men entered.

Captain Hartley and Cecil Clifford shook hands with Frank Reade, Jr. In a very few moments they were the warmest of friends, so instinctive was the sympathetic tie between kindred souls.

"We understand you have perfected a submarine boat, Mr. Reade," said Clifford.

"That is true," replied Frank.

"That is a wonderful triumph. We congratulate you."

"Thank you."

"Do you intend starting for a deep sea cruise—very soon?"

"In a very few days."

"Have you an object in view beyond simple exploration?"

"Nothing special."

Clifford and the captain exchanged glances. Then the former said: "Will you kindly listen to a little story we have to tell, Mr. Reade?"

"With pleasure," replied Frank.

Then Clifford detailed the story of the Donna Veneta and her treasure.

As he dwelt upon the story of the sunken galleon's gold, Frank grew interested.

For some moments after Clifford finished his story he was thoughtful.

Then he said:

"So Gilbert Parker would not lend his ship Aurelian to such an enterprise?"

"No," said Clifford.

"Which shows his folly. Gentlemen, what if I propose to place the submarine boat Dolphin at your disposal?"

Clifford and Hartley sprang forward, and each grasped a hand of the young inventor.

"Hurrah! You have saved the day!" cried Clifford. "We knew that you would look with favor on our plans!"

"Only think of having a submarine boat at our disposal," cried Hartley. "Success is assured!"

"Well, gentlemen, I am decided," said Frank. "We will all go aboard the Dolphin in search of the galleon's gold. The start shall be made at once, and old Parker will find out what a colossal old ass he is."

Hartley and Clifford cheered vociferously. But Frank pulled chairs up to the table, and said:

"Where is your plan or diagram?"

Hartley pulled out the portfolio and opened it; he spread some papers on the table.

They were quickly examined, and then all three men looked at each other blankly.

"Jericho!" gasped Hartley. "Where are the diagrams, Cecil?"

"They ought to be here!"

"But they are not!"

Clifford and Hartley were aghast.

"What has become of them?" he gasped, weakly. "My soul, Hartley, you don't believe that they have been stolen?"

"Stolen!" exclaimed the captain, in a hollow voice. "That is their fate. Cecil, we are ruined men!"

Frank glanced from one to the other.

"Who could have stolen them?" he asked.

"We do not know."

"To whom else have you shown them?"

"To no one—except —"

Clifford and Hartley stared at each other. Then both gasped in the same breath:

"Gilbert Parker!"

"The old hound!" rejoined Hartley, hotly. "Would he dare do such a villainous thing?"

"I believe him capable of anything," said Cecil. "I know he is an old villain!"

Hartley took several turns up and down the room.

"We can prove nothing," he said. "Of course he will deny it. Again, perhaps we have lost them. What shall we do? Can you not repeat that diagram from memory, Cecil?"

In answer, the traveler sat down, and after some time drew crude lines upon paper.

"This is as near as I can remember it," he said, "but I lose much valuable detail."

"What could have prompted us to attempt to take Parker into the scheme at all?" cried Hartley, with self anger. "I might have known that he would try to figure it all into his own coffers. What shall we do?"

"There is only one thing," said Frank, arising.

"And that?"

"We will accept this diagram and scour every foot of the Honduras Gulf. We shall have an advantage in the submarine boat."

"Right!" cried Clifford, in a transport of joy. "There is a solution of all! We will beat Mr. Parker at his own game! Mr. Reade, we owe all to you."

"That is nothing," cried Frank. "I am with you body and soul! But enough! Would you not like to take a look at the Dolphin?"

"Delighted!" both cried.

"Come on then!"

Frank led the way through high gates into an inner yard. In the center of this was a deep basin or tank of water.

It was connected with the river several hundred yards below, by means of a canal and a lock.

In the center of the tank floated the submarine boat.

It was a wonderful specimen of seacraft. The two newcomers gazed at it spellbound.

In shape the Dolphin was long and rakish and her lines indicated speed. Her hull was of plates of steel.

Her main deck was roofed over entirely, giving her an odd appearance as she lay there in the water. In this roof was an enormous plateglass skylight and any number of deadeyes.

These were wholly for purposes of observation from the interior of the boat. There was a large observatory window and conning tower upon each side of the vessel about midships.

A pilot house with a conical dome and heavy glass windows was forward. There was an outer deck or platform to the width of six feet which extended all around the vessel and was protected by a guard-rail.

The Dolphin had three steel masts and a long bowsprit with rigging of steel ropes. These were more for the steadying of the craft than practical use.

She had twin screws which were driven by powerful electric engines on a peculiar storage plan which was wholly the invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

So light and clean cut was the Dolphin that she could make a famous rate of speed even under water.

The interior of the boat was most palatially furnished. Every comfort and convenience known to science was there.

From the pilot-house to the engine-room, salons, state-rooms, magazine and all were complete.

There was also the huge pneumatic reservoir or tank for the sinking or rising of the boat. This was done by simply admitting or expelling water.

Also the chemical generator with its tubes extending to every part of the boat for the furnishing of pure air while under water. Altogether the submarine boat was a marvel.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA.

BARNEY and Pomp had faithfully made every preparation for the submarine cruise.

Stores sufficient to last two years were aboard the boat. She was in apple pie order, her dynamos being ready to start at an instant's notice.

She rocked lightly in the tank, and as Hartley and Clifford went aboard of her they were enthused.

"By the great whale!" cried the captain, "she's the neatest sea craft I have ever seen."

"A floating palace!" declared Clifford. "Mr. Reade, this is no ordinary invention."

"Well," admitted Frank, "she quite excels anything I have yet manufactured, I admit. Yet I think I can excel her merits."

Hartley looked incredulous.

"It does not seem possible," he said. "And yet I cannot dispute you, Mr. Reade. I think anything is quite possible for you."

Frank bowed modestly at this profuse compliment. Then they all repaired to the office again.

A day was agreed upon for the start, and all hands were to be ready at that time.

It was believed that the Donna Veneta could be found even without the important diagram left by Don Cristobal.

As she was a submarine boat, this seemed plausible enough.

"At any rate," declared Clifford, "if we can do no better, we can go into the interior of Honduras and look up the record in the ruin again."

"But if Parker abstracted the diagram, what was his purpose?" asked Frank.

The trio exchanged glances.

"Perhaps he thinks of getting in ahead of us with the Aurelian," ventured Hartley; "it is just like the old hypocrite."

"Indeed, that is so," agreed Clifford.

But Frank Reade, Jr., frowned.

"It will bother him some to locate the Donna Veneta before we do," he said. "It is possible that he can do it, but I don't believe it."

So the matter was dropped.

The spirits of the fortune hunters were high.

They could not restrain their exuberance. That night Hartley and Clifford went back to New York to complete their preparations.

In three days the Dolphin was to begin its submarine voyage for the Gulf. On the afternoon of the second day Hartley picked up a daily paper, and as is always a sea captain's wont, glanced over the shipping news.

He gave a sudden wild start.

"Great whales!" he gasped; "just look at this."

He placed his finger on an item. Clifford read it:

"Said: Thursday, June 5th, the ship Aurelian, Captain Jed Moore, for the West Indies and Central American ports."

The two men looked stupefied. Then Hartley raised his finger significantly.

"Just as true as you live, Cecil Clifford, that old scoundrel is going to try and recover the Donna Veneta's treasure."

"But he has no right to it!"

"What does he care?"

"It would be the act of a thief."

"That is just what he is."

Hartley was thoughtful for some while. He knew that the Aurelian would have a day's start of the Dolphin. But could she beat her to Honduras?

If Parker really had the diagram he certainly had an advantage, for he could at once locate the treasure.

"Well, there is one thing about it," said Cecil, resolutely, "if we run against him in those waters there will be likely to be trouble."

"You are right."

"I don't believe Frank Reade, Jr. will take any of their impudence."

"Nor I."

"Perhaps we had better let him know about this at once. Shall we wire him?"

"Better see him in person. Can we not be all ready to start for Readestown to-day?"

"I see no reason against it."

"By all means let us go."

It did not require much time for the two excited men to get all in readiness for an early start.

Frank Reade, Jr., was not a little surprised when he heard the report of Parker's conduct.

"There is no doubt but that he has gone to Honduras to recover the treasure," he said, "but we will beat him at that game."

"Good!" cried Hartley and Clifford in chorus. "We knew what your sentiments would be, Mr. Reade."

"Well, that is just what they are," said the young inventor, resolutely. "We will make trouble for Mr. Parker. He is entitled to no part of the Veneta's treasure nor shall he have it."

The Dolphin was in apple pie order and ready for the start. A few hours later all were aboard.

We will not dwell upon the leave-taking of Readestown. A large crowd wished the submarine navigators God-speed.

The Dolphin a few days later sailed the waters of the Gulf, and was rapidly on her way to Honduras.

Thus far she had sailed most of the distance on the surface. Now, however, Frank decided to proceed the rest of the way under the water.

So he pressed the valve which filled the reservoir, and the boat at once began to sink.

Down she settled gracefully beneath the waves.

In spite of themselves the voyagers could not help but feel a curious thrill, as they went below the surface, and knew that they were going to the bottom of the sea.

There was a brief instant of darkness.

Then Frank touched the electric lever and—presto! the interior of the boat was ablaze with light.

And outside the radiance shed far and wide into the sea depths. Myriads of fish came trooping down through the translucent mass.

They were of thousands of shapes, colors, and varieties. Some of them were so large as to threaten the safety of the boat.

But fortunately these large ones were great cowards, and kept at a safe distance from the boat.

Frank turned on the search-light and sent its rays shooting down into the depths.

As yet the bottom could not be seen.

"Are we getting down to the center of the earth?" cried Hartley; "it must be an immense depth here!"

"I see nothing of the bottom yet," cried Clifford. "Can the little boat stand the strain, Frank?"

The young inventor knit his brows.

"Why, I think so," he said, but yet looked anxious, for the Dolphin was creaking and groaning somewhat; "the bottom must be near. Ah, there, I can see it!"

And a wonderful sight it was which burst upon the view of all at that moment.

The bottom of the sea.

They were sure at that moment that they were the only human beings who had ever beheld it at that depth.

It was like a view into another and strange world.

To adequately describe it would be quite impossible.

There were forests of marine plants, some of them gigantic in size, cavernous recesses, the lurking place of strange sea monsters, and coral reefs deeply submerged in sand.

The Dolphin sailed over this wonderful scene, while the voyagers took it all in spellbound.

"If the Veneta is sunk in such a sea as this," declared Clifford, "it will be difficult enough to get at her on account of the marine growth."

"You are right," agreed Hartley. "What do you think of it, Frank?"

"Well," said the young inventor, after some thought, "I hardly believe that the sea which the Veneta is buried in is of the same sort as this. While the Gulf of Honduras is undoubtedly rich in marine growth, yet I believe that there are greater tracts of sandy plain and coral reef. Let us hope to find the Veneta in such."

"Amen!" cried Clifford. "We will accept no other belief any way!"

The Dolphin kept on for miles sailing over the forest of marine growth.

Had the voyagers felt the inclination there would have been no open space for a safe descent.

For to risk a descent among the tangled fibres and branches of the marine plants would be worse than folly. Powerful as the Dolphin was she might not be able to extricate herself.

For hours the submarine boat kept on in this way.

Barney was at the helm, while Frank and Hartley and Clifford sat in the cabin and discussed the subject of locating the Veneta.

Barney kept his hand on the Dolphin's wheel and a sharp lookout out of the window at the same time.

Pomp had been at work in the galley.

He had finished his cooking and for a moment stood looking out of his window at the curious sights which seemed to pass in review before him.

Suddenly he heard Barney in the pilot-house above calling him.

"Shure, naygur, an' phwere is the heart av yez? Can yez bear to see me shtarve, yez ill-mannered coon yez?"

"Hu!" grunted Pomp. "Why didn' yo' say yo' was hungry?"

"Bejabers, yez have only to luk at me to see that."

"Yo' am right dar, I'sh; wha' yo' loike fo' to eat?"

"Shure I'll take it in liquid form if yez don't moind."

"Yo' want some consomme, den?"

"Divil a bit! Yez know phat's best to warrum the cockles av me heart."

Pomp chuckled.

"I done flink I undahstan' yo'," he said. "I brung yo' up some dreckly."

Pomp reached down behind the flour bin and brought forth from the darkness a black bottle.

The label on it read:

Good Bourbon Whisky.

Now everybody knows the Irishman's weakness; the Englishman imbibes ale, the German drinks beer, the Frenchman sips wine, the American brandy, but the true bred Celt despises all of these and turns to whisky.

Pomp poured a good dose of the pure article into a small flask; then he did something else.

CHAPTER IV.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE two were warm friends, but ever addicted to the playing of jokes upon each other. Sometimes one had the better of it, and sometimes the other.

Pomp saw what he believed an elegant opportunity to square some past grievances with his friend.

"Golly, I done fix dat chile!" he chuckled. "He laike whisky, do he? Massy Lordy, I gib him de Keeley Cure!"

With which, still chuckling, he reached up and took down a small bag of ground red dust and seeds, and which was marked "Ground Red Peppers."

"Golly!" chuckled the ducky, "he done flink somefin' got him fo' suah!"

Into the flask he put a liberal quantity of the ground peppers. Then he touched his tongue to the compound.

The touch fairly lifted him off his feet. A swallow would seem sufficient to send a man up in smoke, so hot was it.

So delighted was the ducky with the prospect that he yielded to immediate laughter.

Barney heard it and cried:

"Phwat the divil ails yez, naygur? Phwat do yez foind so funny?"

Pomp sobered at once.

"I was jes' larfin' to mahse'f," he replied, hastily, fearful that he would be suspected.

"Laughin' at yesilf! Well, shure that's nothin' to be wondhered at. But shure will yez hurry up wid the crather?"

"Yo' hold yo' patience jes' a bit till I put dis bread in de oven!" replied Pomp. "I'se comin'."

Then he picked up the flask and sprang up the stairs. Barney took it from his hand eagerly.

"Begorra, it's a gittle-mon yez are!" cried Barney, "yez know well enuff phwat I need."

With which the Celt threw the flask to his lips.

Pomp stood eagerly waiting for the explosion. Gurgle, gurgle went the liquor down his throat.

The ducky stared.

Could he believe his senses?

The Celt slowly and deliberately drained the flask. Then he laid it down and said:

"Bejabers, that tastes like some whisky I once got in Donnybrook!" he said. "It's fairly alive!"

Pomp gave a gasp.

Then he picked up the flask and looked at Barney, like one in a dream. His eyes fairly rolled in their sockets.

Barney looked at him in surprise.

"Phwat the divil ails yez!" he cried. "Shure are yez sick!"

"N—no, sah!" replied the dazed coon, "but—did yo' drink all dat whisky roight down an'—"

"Phwat the divil did yez expict me to do? Did yez want a sip yersilf?"

"N—no, sah!" spluttered the coon, "but—but—"

He said no more, but made his way down the stairs slowly to the galley. There he scratched his woolly pate and muttered:

"On mah wo'd I neber heerd ob sich a mouf an' stummick as dat fishman hab got. I done flink he make a good meal on window glass anytime he feel laike it."

But Barney had tasted the most fiery of liquors too many times to mind a little thing like this. He knew from the taste that the ducky had doctored the liquor and he suspected what it was.

So he chuckled to himself.

"Begorra, the coon thought he had me solid that toime. But fer a fact he got badly left, fer divil a bit do I moind a little foire in the crather."

But Barney laid it up against the ducky just the same, and muttered:

"I'll foix him fer it!"

While Pomp said:

"I done flink dat fishman am cast iron inside. I never fought he was sich a tough man afore."

But for all that, the whisky did effect the Celt.

It was powerful strong and made Barney feel a bit tipsy. His hand was not so strong at the wheel.

As a result, an accident occurred. The boat was approaching a reef at full speed, when Barney's foot slipped and he fell.

Before he could regain his feet the wheel spun around, there was a shock and everybody was hurled to the cabin floor. The lights went out, there was a booming of waters and all was darkness.

The boat stood still. Frank Reade, Jr., was the first to recover himself.

He arose and groped his way into the pilot-house.

"Mither save us!" came a voice from the corner; "shure it's kilt I am intoirly!"

"Barney," cried Frank, "what has happened?"

"Begorra, Mither Frank, divil a bit kin I tell yez. I think, though, that we have run ferninst a reef, sor!"

"Well, that's pretty work," cried Frank, angrily. "What do you mean by such stupidity?"

"Shure, sor, I hope yez'll not blame me too much. Me fut slipped an' I fell."

There was nothing to be done but make the best of it, though Frank gave the Celt a good reprimand.

Then he made haste to examine the exact position of the submarine boat and her chances.

It was an affair more than ordinarily serious. The reflection that they might be immovably fixed on the reef, gave all the voyagers a chill.

The electric lights were quickly turned on and the engines carefully inspected.

These fortunately were fond to be uninjured.

Frank reversed them, with a view to drawing the boat off the ledge if possible.

But this was useless. The boat was stuck there and would not move. It was a serious case.

What was to be done?

They were many fathoms deep in the sea. Unless the boat could

be freed from her position on the ledge, their fate would be too dreadful for contemplation.

Doomed to die of starvation at the bottom of the sea. It was a dreadful thought.

Clifford was very pale as he approached Frank and said:

"What are the chances, Mr. Reade?"

Frank shook his head slowly.

"Rather scant!" he said. "I can give no definite answer until after I have taken a look at her from the outside."

"From the outside?"

"Yes."

Clifford looked surprised.

"How can you do that?" he asked.

"Easy enough," replied Frank. "I have a patent diving suit which I can wear."

"Well, I am interested," declared Clifford. "How will you dare to venture out in these waters in a diving suit? I should think the pressure would be too great."

"Not with my new diving suit," replied Frank. "I have perfected it so that, as no life line is used, a pressure of almost any depth can be resisted."

"Without a life line? How do you breathe?"

"By means of a chemical generator which is portable and is carried on the back. It furnishes the best of air and is similar to the generator which furnishes our boat with oxygen."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Clifford. "You are truly a man of inventions, Mr. Reade."

Frank laughed.

"That is the most simple of all my inventions," he said.

"You don't happen to have two of those wonderful diving suits, do you?"

"I have half a dozen."

"Good! Would you mind my putting on one of them and accompanying you?"

"Certainly you may."

Frank called to Barney, who brought out the diving suits. Two of them were selected.

Frank and Clifford were soon encased in the suits, and ready to leave the cabin.

Each carried a small ax at the girdle. Otherwise they were unarmed.

Of course there was something to fear from the monsters of the deep, but neither shrank from the risk. A moment later they entered the vestibule.

Then Frank closed the cabin door and pressed a valve. Instantly the vestibule filled with water.

It was an easy matter then to open the outer door and walk out on the deck.

It required some moments for both to get accustomed to the unusual pressure. But after a while they were enabled to see and think clearly.

Then Frank began to descend from the deck to the bed of the sea. He found solid footing in the sand which covered that part of the reef.

He made his way slowly along to the bow of the Dolphin.

A glance was enough.

The steel rail of the vessel was driven deep into the reef and seemed immovable. The keel rested in a cleft of coral which bound it tightly on all sides.

So intent was Frank upon examining the position of the Dolphin, that he gave no thought to anything else about him.

So it happened that Clifford, who had been engaged in looking for coral specimens, came near getting into a bad scrape.

He had caught sight of curious coral growth jutting out from the reef, and was determined to make an effort to secure it.

He clambered up a steep place and placed his hand upon the coral. At the same moment he noticed an orifice in the rock just to his right.

Even as he did so he fancied he saw the glitter of something bright beyond. But he gave it no heed.

But while reaching for the coral a long, sinewy arm darted out of the orifice. In an instant it wound itself about the body of the unsuspecting diver.

It wound about him in serpentine fold and he was torn from his perch and drawn toward the orifice.

In one swift instant Clifford realized his peril and the character of his foe.

He knew that the sinewy arm was really the tentacle of a fierce octopus or sea-cat, and that its horrid jaws were waiting to mangle him.

And he seemed powerless to resist. For a moment he was dazed with utter horror and indecision.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE REEF.

In his horror, Clifford forgot himself and shouted wildly to Frank, but the young inventor did not reply.

Of course he could not hear. Indeed, the only way conversation could be carried on, was by placing the helmets closely together and loudly shouting.

So that the young inventor, intent on examining the Dolphin's position, thought of nothing else, until by chance he turned his head.

Then the sight which he beheld filled him with horror.

For a moment he could not act.

"My God," he gasped, "Clifford is lost!"

Then his senses returned.

He realized that his friend was in mortal peril, and that he must go to his aid. At any cost he must try and save him.

So he drew his ax from his girdle and made a leap forward.

In the meanwhile, Clifford had been fighting all that was in his power. He wielded his ax with desperate energy.

He struck blow after blow at the huge tentacle which held him so firmly. Each blow threatened to sever it.

But even as success was crowning his efforts, out darted another arm and encircled him.

This was surely drawing him into the orifice, when Frank came to the rescue.

The young inventor dealt a terrific blow at the tentacle. It partly severed it. Another huge arm came stealing out and Frank dealt it a blow also.

Clifford was too exhausted to do more. But Frank threw an arm about him, and dealing the tentacle a severing blow drew his friend quickly out of reach.

Nothing more was seen of the octopus.

It did not emerge from its den, but a dense cloud of black fluid did, and it so clouded the water that Frank was obliged to drag Clifford some distance away.

The latter recovered quickly. Frank put his helmet close and shouted:

"Are you all right?"

"Yes!" replied Clifford, "it was a close call!"

"Indeed it was!"

"But for you, I should have lost my life!"

Frank made signs to return to the Dolphin, but Clifford felt sufficient curiosity to ask:

"How about the boat?"

"There is but one way to get her off the reef."

"And that—"

"I will explain when we get back to the boat."

"All right!"

In a few moments they reached the rail. To their surprise they saw Barney in the vestibule all in his diver's suit.

The brave Celt had seen their distress and was coming to their rescue.

"Begorra, Mistor Frank!" he cried, when the two divers were once more safely aboard. "I thought it was the end av yez. May the Howly Vargin be praised, yez are all roight an' safe!"

"Well, I thought our friend, Clifford, was surely done for," said Frank, "but by the best of good fortune he is still with us."

"Which happy fact I owe to Mr. Reade," declared Clifford. "I shall never forget it."

The matter was dropped now, however, for another important one. The question as to the fate of the Dolphin was now brought up.

Frank was thoughtful for some while, and finally said:

"Wait until to-morrow. Then I will be able to decide."

That night few in the party slept very soundly; at an early hour Pomp had a steaming breakfast ready.

All were rather sober as they sat around the table.

"Well," said Frank, "if we are doomed to spend the rest of our days at the bottom of the sea, we can count upon extending our span of life to a limit of about two years."

"How do you make that exact calculation?" asked Captain Hartley.

"There are just stores enough on board to last two years," replied Frank.

"After they are gone?"

Frank laughed nervously.

"Two years is a good long while in which to make up our minds what to do. Perhaps before that time we may hit upon a good scheme."

"Let us hope so," said Clifford; "but we should like to hear of your scheme of yesterday, Frank."

"By all means!" cried Hartley.

"Huh! neber you mind," cried Pomp. "Marse Frank he neber get stuck. He fin' some way out ob any kin' ob a scrape."

"Bejabers, that's roight!" averred Barney.

After some reflection and much persuasion Frank divulged the plan which had occurred to him.

"It is a simple one," he said; "it consists merely of digging a mine under the boat and trying to dislodge her with dynamite."

"Hurrah!" cried Clifford. "What could be better?"

"So say I!" said Hartley.

But Frank shook his head slowly.

"There are many risks involved," he said. "We must consider the possibility of the Dolphin springing a leak, or of the dynamite straining her timbers."

"But—how can she spring a leak?"

"Her timbers or plates may be already started, and dislodging her may start the leak in an instant."

The faces of all fell.

"Is there any certainty of such being the case?" asked Hartley.

"No certainty," replied Frank, "only a possibility, and a very strong one at that."

"Then it is narrowed down to a question of expediency, whether it is better to risk instant death, or the more lingering fate of two years under the deep sea."

"Exactly," agreed Frank. "If we explode the dynamite now the boat may fill and sink in ten minutes. There is the chance."

"Humph!" said Hartley. "If we have got to die, it may as well be now as two years from now."

Frank glanced around the little circle inquiringly:

"What do the rest of you say?" he asked. "Shall we accept the chance?"

"Put it to ballot," said Hartley.

"Agreed!"

Clifford made out some ballots and handed them around. They were marked and thrown on the table.

Hartley counted them.

His face wore an indescribable expression as he looked up and said:

"The question is settled. The ballot is unanimous."

"In favor of—"

"The dynamite."

Frank Reade, Jr., arose from his chair. He was very cool and steady as he said to Barney:

"Bring up the metal canisters from the hold. Rig a wire with the battery. Then procure picks and spades, put on your suits, you and Pomp, and come with me."

Pomp went for the picks and spades. In a few moments all was in readiness.

Frank, with Barney and Pomp, donned diving suits.

Then they went out on deck, and a little later were at the keel of the boat.

Frank directed the digging of the mine.

The coral was easily picked away, but the ledge rock required drilling and splitting.

Slowly but surely the mine was made. All that day the work went on.

It was noon of the succeeding day, however, before it was finished. Then the cartridges were placed.

Great bales, made of soft burlap filled with sand, were placed under the keel and over the dynamite, to act as a cushion and reduce the shock.

Then the wires were connected, and the three divers went aboard the Dolphin.

They removed their diving suits, and Frank faced Clifford and Hartley, who were pale and somewhat excited.

Now that the critical moment had come, each really shrank from the mighty risk. Yet neither could justly be called a coward.

"Well!" said Hartley.

"Well!" exclaimed Clifford.

Then there was period of silence. Frank looked keenly at the two men.

"What shall it be?" he asked. "I shall leave it all with you."

"Do not hesitate on our account," said Hartley firmly; "we do not shrink from it."

"All will be over in a very few moments. We shall know if it is to be life or death."

"It would be death in the long run anyway," declared Clifford.

"Whatever it is, let us all meet our fate like brave men."

"That settles it," declared Frank, "prepare for the shock!"

Everything movable aboard the boat was carefully secured. Then Frank announced all in readiness.

It was a moment of suspense.

Frank stood by the vestibule door with the wire and electric key in his hand. He closed his eyes and spasmodically pressed it.

It was all a matter of momentous doubt. All hinged upon the result of the explosion. Five human lives hung in the balance.

The result was instantaneous.

All that the voyagers could ever remember of the affair afterwards was that there was a terrific shock, a confused jumbling of ideas and incidents, and then—

Frank Reade, Jr., opened his eyes and looked about him.

Wonder of wonders!

It was broad daylight.

They were on the surface of the sea. All about them was one heaving expanse of blue.

"Great whales!" cried Captain Hartley. "What sort of a transformation do you call this, mates?"

"We are saved!" cried Clifford.

"Begorra, it's on the surface we are," averred Barney. "Howliver did this happen?"

"Huh! Don' yo' know, I'ish?" cried Pomp. "Yo' done lef' de switch ob de reservoir turned on."

"Bejabers that's thrue!" cried the Celt. "I shure fergot it."

"It's all right!" cried Frank; "it helped the explosion to raise the boat. Now it is only a question as to whether the boat leaks or not."

"How shall we find out?"

"We will sink if she does," laughed Frank; "but I think we could hear the water coming in if such was the case."

With which Frank went below. He listened at the bulkheads leading into the hold.

But the boat seemed as buoyant as ever. There was not the slightest indication that she was leaking.

The spirits of all now waxed more cheerful. It was a moral certainty that the boat was saved and their lives as well.

But as this realization fully dawned upon them, a loud cry came from Pomp.

"Hi dar! luk out or we be run down, Marse Frank!"

CHAPTER VI.

PARKER'S DEEP GAME.

So engrossed had all been in the question of saving the Dolphin that they were unconscious of other things transpiring near them.

All unnoticed, a full rigged ship had come bearing down upon them from the north.

It had been not a half mile distant when they came to the surface, but they had not looked in that direction or noticed it.

It was now not fifty yards from the Dolphin and bearing directly down upon the submarine boat. It looked as if there was a deliberate purpose to run the boat down.

Frank Reade sprung into the pilot-house and switched the propeller valve, at the same moment turning the rudder sharp about.

The engines responded instantly and the Dolphin switched about, not an instant too soon.

The big ship's hull just grazed her stern. It was certainly a very close call.

Indignantly Frank threw open the pilot-house window, and shouted:

"Ahoy, there, do you mean to run us down?"

Only a mumbling reply came back as the ship swept on. Men were seen in her chains and at her after rail.

The ship lay over to the wind and showed her stern. Instinctively all looked for the name.

And before this could be seen, Captain Hartley, who had been staring at the vessel, cried:

"Soul of old Neptune! It is the Aurelian, mates!"

The announcement was like a dynamite bomb to the others.

"The Aurelian!" gasped Clifford.

"Are you sure of it?" cried Frank, eagerly.

"Of course I am; don't you suppose I would know my own ship in any part of the world?" cried Hartley, indignantly.

"You ought to," agreed Frank, "and your assertion is proved, for there is the name!"

This was true.

Upon the stern of the passing vessel was the name, "Aurelian." That she was Gilbert Parker's ship was a dead certainty.

That she had meant to run the submarine boat down was also a sure thing. It was an atrocious purpose and made Frank's blood boil.

"The mean wretch!" he cried, angrily, "he certainly meant to run us down."

"That he did!" cried Hartley, "that is just like old Parker."

They discussed the matter angrily. The Aurelian was already half a mile away.

That she meant to recover the Veneta's treasure if possible before the Dolphin was a certainty. The thought angered Frank.

"I see the whole cowardly game," he cried angrily. "And they shall pay for it well. They shall never carry home one penny of the Veneta's gold!"

"But what could we do against them?" asked Hartley, "their ship is larger than ours!"

"You forget," replied Frank. "The torpedo boat is the most deadly craft in the U. S. navy. We can attack her on the same scale."

"You are right," cried the captain. "We surely need fear nothing from her. We could sail under her if we chose and sink her."

"Just so," said Frank. "At least I will give them a good lesson."

He sprang into the pilot-house. He was about to give chase to the Aurelian, when a warning cry came from Barney, who had just come up from the engine-room.

"Shure, sor," he cried, "there's bad luck to pay!"

"What do you mean?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"The tank, sor, is out of order. Shure, it must have been the shock av the dynamite!"

"The tank!" exclaimed Frank, and sprung to the key board. He pressed the pneumatic key. It would not operate.

The boat remained upon the surface. Barney was right.

The tank was certainly out of order. But what was the cause of it? Was it the result of the explosion?

He reckoned that this was true. He went down into the hold and made a quick examination.

This showed him that the tank had shifted its position, and bent the tubes so that water could not be pressed through them. Until these were straightened there was no hope of controlling the boat under water.

Frank studied the situation for some while.

He realized that it was an unfortunate situation, and that unless the matter was remedied the expedition must prove a failure.

Just how much of a job it would be to repair the damage he could hardly estimate.

"Well, Frank," cried Clifford, "what do you think of it? Is it an irreparable matter?"

"No," replied the young inventor, slowly; "yet to tell the truth, she ought to go into the dry dock. The tank should be moved back and properly stayed."

"Is it impossible to do that without going into the dry dock?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then the game is up?"

"Not yet," said Frank, hopefully, "there is a chance, I think we can readjust and straighten the tubes. If so, then we shall be all right."

"But that will delay us!"

"Certainly!"

"For how long?"

"A day!"

There was a dubious silence.

"Then the Aurelian will reach the Gulf of Honduras first. Perhaps she may even recover the treasure."

"Let her, if she can," said Frank, "it will not be such an easy matter for her. She will have to send down divers and make many preparations which will take up time. We will get there about as soon as she does, I think."

Work was at once begun upon the twisted tubes.

Barney and Pomp brought all the necessary tools down into the place and operations commenced.

As they progressed, Frank found that the job was not to be as difficult as he had imagined.

The tubes were uncoupled and straightened, and the valves readjusted. But it required fourteen hours of hard work.

In the meanwhile the Aurelian was long out of sight and well on her way into the Gulf of Honduras. She must surely reach the sunken galleon before the Dolphin.

"Fate seems to play a very important hand in this matter," said Clifford. "With all our accidents it is a wonder that we are able to reach Honduras at all."

"That is true," agreed Frank, "but let us hope that we shall meet with no more."

"Amen!"

The tank was now once more in working order. In other respects the Dolphin was all right.

Once again she set out for the continuance of her voyage.

Darkness was now over the sea. Yet the submarine boat, with her powerful search-light was enabled to make fully as good time as in daylight.

It was in the afternoon of the next day that Frank announced that they had passed through the Yucatan Channel and were really in the Gulf of Honduras.

Once more the diagram as prepared from memory by Clifford was consulted.

Sailing by this for hours the Dolphin kept on.

It was evening when they reached the locality where the Donna Veneta was supposed to have sunk.

"This is the spot as near as I can locate it," said Clifford.

"If that is true," said Frank, "we have outwitted Parker, for the Aurelian is certainly not in this vicinity."

It was true that no vessel was in sight. The Aurelian must have gone upon the wrong tack.

"What will we do?" asked Captain Hartley; "shall we wait until morning, or attempt to explore the ocean by electric light?"

"Even in daylight we should have to use the search-light," said Clifford, eagerly. "Suppose we examine it now, Frank!"

"All right," agreed the young inventor. "All be ready for the descent."

The doors and windows were quickly and hermetically closed. Then the Dolphin plunged beneath the surface.

Down she went for several hundred fathoms before the bottom was seen.

Then a sandy plain lay before them.

"That is good!" cried Frank. "It will be easier to find the Donna Veneta than if the bottom was covered with weeds."

"True," agreed Clifford. "I hope we will not be long in discovering her."

All hands now posted themselves at the windows. The search-light flashed everywhere across the sandy plain while the boat moved slowly about in the quest.

All manner of curious objects were encountered. Sometimes a huge projecting ledge of rock would be mistaken for the wreck.

And thus the search went on slowly and systematically. Results were not far distant.

CHAPTER VII.

A PARLEY.

For the rest of the night the quest was kept up. It was morning before anything worthy of note was discovered.

Then Frank in the pilot-house flashing the light into the far depths gave a sudden start.

The object which met his gaze was certainly one well worthy of attention and interest.

He saw several forms groping about at the base of a small reef. He knew at once from their shape that they were not marine animals.

"On my word!" he cried, "here's a go!"

In a moment Clifford and Hartley were by his side.

"What is it?" cried the latter.

"Look!"

Frank pointed to the distant objects. A startled exclamation burst from the lips of both men.

"Well I'm beat!" gasped Clifford, "they are human beings."

"Divers!" exclaimed Hartley.

"Nothing more nor less," said Frank. "It is quite likely that the Aurelian is just overhead."

"That is the whole story!" cried Clifford. "They are looking for the Donna Veneta."

Frank put on more speed.

"Well," he said, shortly, "let us run down and interview them!"

"Correct," cried Clifford. "We will ask a bit of an explanation."

The divers were apparently astonished at the sudden radiance of the search light. They stood in a group waiting for developments.

As the submarine boat came rusaing down, they seemed alarmed, but Frank showed himself at the pilot-house windows, and made conciliatory gestures.

The submarine boat came to a halt not ten yards from the divers. No sign of the Donna Veneta's wreck was visible anywhere.

"Get on a diving suit, Barney," cried Frank. "Go out and ask them what they are doing here."

"All roight, sor!"

Barney hastened to obey orders. But before he could leave the boat, the divers gave the signal and were pulled up rapidly to the surface.

Frank instantly reversed the tank lever. The Dolphin began to rise.

"Where are you going, Frank?" asked Clifford in surprise.

"To the surface!"

"What for?"

"I want to see whether these men are from the Aurelian or not."

"Good!"

The Dolphin sprung up out of the deep sea. All was daylight and the sun was well up toward the meridian.

A vessel lay to not one hundred yards distant. There were a group of men leaning over her rail and apparently hauling up something on lines.

These of course were the divers. A moment later they were pulled safely over the rail.

Frank instantly sailed nearer the Aurelian, for she it was, and made signals.

In response a man appeared in the shrouds. He was at once recognized. It was Gilbert Parker.

"There is the old chap himself!" cried Cecil.

"Let us see what he has to say," said Frank, as he stepped out on the deck.

It was but a moment's work to answer the hail of Parker. The latter's words were pitched in a snarling key.

"What do you want?"

"We want to have a talk with you!" cried Frank. "Come over in a small boat. You will be safe!"

"I have no business that I wish to transact with you."

"Ah, but it may be to your interest to talk with us," returned Frank.

"You had better grant us an interview."

A snarling unintelligible reply came back. Then a boat put out from the Aurelian's side and was rowed swiftly alongside the Dolphin.

Gilbert Parker and a dark-browed man stood in the bow. They stepped out on the Dolphin's deck.

"Captain Warren," said Parker, with a peculiar smile, as he exchanged salutes and introduced his companion, "he is the present sailing master of the Aurelian."

Then he turned abruptly to Frank, and said:

"What are you doing here?"

Frank gazed keenly at the old rascal for a moment and then replied with deliberation:

"We are in search of the sunken galleon Donna Veneta. What are you here for?"

Parker's gaze shifted, but yet he managed to make reply:

"We are here for the same purpose."

"Do you think your course has been an honorable one?" asked Frank, cuttingly.

"To the victor belongs the spoils!" was the evasive but bold reply.

"How did you know where to look for the galleon?"

"Did I not see the diagram?"

"Did you not steal it?"

"Do you mean to insult me?" snapped Parker, angrily.

"I mean to speak plainly and truthfully to you," said Frank, firmly; "the diagram disappeared that very night that it was shown to you!"

"Very substantial evidence of my guilt," sneered Parker; "did anyone see me take it?"

"It matters not whether anyone saw you take it or not," declared Frank, "the fact remains that you knew where to look for the sunken galleon, and you could not have done so without some means of guidance."

Parker grinned impudently.

"Well," he said, "have I not as good a right to the gold as you?"

"No," replied Frank, "the gold belongs rightfully to Mr. Clifford, who discovered the records of its existence. You prove yourself a thief by your underhand methods in trying to get it."

"You dare to call me a thief?" cried Parker hotly.

"You are worse than a thief! You are capable of any crime!"

Something in Frank's steely eye held the villain at bay. He glared at him madly for some moments, and then said:

"I do not intend that anybody else shall recover that treasure. I have come down into these waters for it and I intend to find it. If you interfere with me I shall blow you into atoms. You may take the warning!"

"Really," said Frank, with a smile. "You are quite a bully, Mr. Parker. Be sure of your strength before you venture to make threats. As for the Donna Veneta's gold, it is not a certainty that it can ever be found or recovered by either of us. However, if it is found we shall claim it by right of Mr. Clifford's just claim, and you will not dare to deny it. Let this terminate the interview. Good-day!"

Frank turned on his heel and went into the cabin.

Parker stood a moment the personification of rage and hatred. Then he shook his fist at Frank's retreating form, and hissed:

"We shall see! Gilbert Parker never fails. Beware!"

With which he turned and stepped into his own boat. He was rowed back to the Aurelian.

Frank in the pilot-house closed the doors, and then pressed the lever which caused the Dolphin to sink.

Down she settled rapidly until finally she rested upon the sandy bottom of the sea.

"Now," he said, "we will proceed to search for the Donna Veneta."

"If it is our good fortune to find the galleon's gold, is there not danger that we may have trouble with Parker?" asked Clifford.

"I don't see how he can trouble us!" said Frank. "We are out of his way and can keep so. If I were so inclined I could sink his ship now."

"It would be a mercy!" declared Hartley. "I have no grudge against the ship. It is only the owner!"

"Wait!" said Frank, decidedly. "You will see that his fate will yet overtake him. I have never seen it fail. Rascality is bound to meet its just reward!"

Preparations were made for renewing the search for the galleon.

As full two hundred years had elapsed since she had gone to the bottom, it was likely that she was buried somewhat in the sand.

This drifting for two centuries over her hull might indeed have completely covered her up.

The only way, therefore, to make sure of her discovery was to search for some part of her rigging or hull, which might yet project itself above the sand, or at least the finding of some object which might guide them as to her exact location.

To be sure this seemed somewhat like looking for a needle in a haystack, but yet the search was carried on.

Barney and Clifford were selected to accompany Frank. Pomp and Hartley were to manipulate the search-light aboard the Dolphin.

And thus the quest began.

Donning their diving suits, the three searchers left the Dolphin. They made their way over the sandy floor.

It was a close and careful search which they proceeded to make.

And after wandering some distance from the Dolphin, Frank made the first important discovery.

He saw an object wedged in a projecting spur of coral. He extricated and examined it.

It was the rusted hilt of a sword. But little was left of the ivory grip, but the steel and gold frame was intact.

In an instant Barney and Clifford were by his side.

They placed their helmets together and Clifford shouted:

"You have made a discovery of value, Frank."

"Yes, I think I have," replied the young inventor.

"Perhaps the ship is right under us at this moment?"

"I think it would be well to dig down a bit and see what is beneath us," said Frank.

"Whurroo! Here goes thin!" cried Barney, thrusting his spade into the sand. He turned up a spadeful.

Then his spade struck something solid. An object was brought to view? It was stationary.

"What is it?" asked Clifford.

Frank bent down and examined it. Then he arose and said;

"It is the stump of a ship's mast. On my word, friends, I believe the galleon lies buried beneath us."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DIVERS' BATTLE.

BARNEY cut a caper in the sand, and Clifford fairly embraced Frank.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Success is bound to be ours!"

"It looks like it!"

"If the galleon is under us, we have only to dig down to her deck level, and then find our way into her cabin."

"Just so!"

"How is the sand?"

"Judging from the size of the mast and the point at which she is broken off, I should say not more than four or five feet."

"Why, it will take no time to dig down that far."

"It ought not to."

"Here goes!"

Having a spade also, Clifford began to dig with Barney. In a very few moments the blades struck something solid. The sand was scraped away, and boards were revealed.

"The ship's deck!" cried Clifford, half insane with glee. "Hurrah! Now we have hit it!"

Quickly they cleared a space of several feet. To the surprise of all the timbers seemed so well preserved and sound as ever.

"That is remarkable," cried Frank, "after a lapse of two centuries. There must be some preservative element in the water here!"

"Indeed I thought of that myself," declared Clifford; "it seems to be more buoyant and of a different quality from ordinary sea water. Also there is a peculiar substance in the sand which is uncommon!"

An effort would have been at once made to cut a section of the deck away had it not been for an incident quite unforeseen.

They were just at the angle of quite a high reef.

Around this suddenly five men appeared in diving-suits with ropes and life lines.

They were the Aurelian divers. Each one carried a heavy ax and a spade. They paused at sight of the three divers from the Dolphin.

For a moment not a move was made by either party. Then Clifford leaned forward and shouted to Frank:

"They are Parker's men!"

"Yes!"

"What do you think their game is? Will they trouble us?"

"I am sure of it, if they think we have discovered the galleon."

"They most know that we have."

"Yes."

"Look! They are menacing us! What shall we do?"

"There is but one thing to do," declared Frank, grittily. "We must defend ourselves at all hazards!"

The five divers from the Aurelian were handicapped somewhat more than their rivals on account of the life lines.

But this did not deter them from making a threatening move just the same.

They advanced with excited gestures. The foremost, Frank fancied, was Parker himself.

The young inventor was not a little disturbed as to what the outcome of the affair would be.

If blows were resorted to, then there must be loss of life. This was something which Frank always deprecated.

He could not endure the thought of destroying these men, though they meant to destroy him.

It was an easy matter to cut their life lines and terminate their existence in a brief moment.

And yet the horror of the thing held him enthralled.

The divers advanced threateningly, evidently confident that they could drive away the three men with their superior numbers.

But this was not so easy.

Frank and his companions stood side by side.

"Do not strike unless we are really attacked," he declared, "then do not take their lives if you can help it."

The foremost of the Aurelian's men made a dive at Frank.

The young inventor dodged and struck the fellow over the helmet with the flat end of his ax.

The shock laid him out senseless; but another followed him.

This one struck Clifford to his knees. But Barney was quick to the rescue and saved the explorer's life.

A quick blow from the Celt's spade dashed the diver over senseless. The other three drew back.

It was now even up. Barney was spoiling for a fight.

He shook his ax and rushed toward the three divers. But at that moment one of them apparently became terrified and pulled on the danger line.

In an instant they were twirled upwards and out of sight. The insensible ones also went.

For a moment our divers stood spellbound. Then they placed their helmets together and Clifford shouted:

"Hurrah! a victory for us!"

"They evidently got more than they bargained for," said Frank.

"Begorra, it's a mighty lucky thing for them that they went!" cried Barney. "Shure I wud soon have laid them all out the spalpeens!"

"They certainly were not over well gifted with pluck," agreed Frank. "But I am sure that we are not done with them yet!"

"So am I!" agreed Clifford; "old Parker is a literal blood-hound. He will never leave a scent."

"Be jabbers, let them cum agin if they want to!" cried Barney. "Shure, I'm in fer thyrin' to get into the buried ship again."

"That's right!" cried Frank. "We must not abandon that scheme. Let us be at work!"

They picked up their spades and once more set heartily at work.

So swiftly did Barney and Clifford throw sand that it was not long before a large space on the galleon's deck had been cleared.

Then a closed hatch was revealed.

Barney put his spade under it and quickly pried it open. Some stairs descended into the cabin below.

Frank placed his helmet against Clifford's and shouted:

"I will descend first. It will be better for only one of us to explore the galleon at a time. The Aurelian's men may return at any time."

Clifford saw the justice of this, and said:

"You are right. We will hold guard here."

Frank put a foot on the cabin stairs. He descended quickly and entered the cabin.

As he did so, he came to a startled halt in the center of the cabin. What followed was ever after to him like a hideous nightmare.

The electric globe on his helmet lit up everything in the cabin.

And in its sickening glare the scene which was enacted was enough to freeze the blood in the veins of any ordinary man.

"My soul!" he gasped, and threw up his arms.

From every corner of the cabin there rushed toward him ghastly stiffened human bodies, corpses of men who had been dead for two centuries. Could he believe his senses?

The agitation he created in the water of the pent up cabin, caused the bodies to fly toward him like steel particles toward a magnet. He put up his hands to ward them off.

In every conceivable and distorted shape were the ghastly occupants of the cabin.

There they were, hideous in death, savage looking men, cutthroats and scoundrels of the past two centuries. But how was it that they were not dust long ago?

How was it that they had been so well preserved? Was it the action of the water, or the fact that they had for so long been closed up in that cabin?

One old fellow in a gold laced coat and with long, flowing hair and beard came rushing toward Frank.

But even as the young inventor pushed him aside the coat crumbled and one arm dropped away.

The influx of fresh water from above was beginning to tell.

It could be easily seen that the preservation of the bodies for such a wonderful period of time was due wholly to a certain element in the water, and the fact that they had been closely bottled up in the cabin.

These men had, two centuries before, sailed the waters of the Honduras Gulf and left their homes in sunny Spain to seek an El Dorado in the New World.

And this had been their end. It was a wonderful thing to ponder upon.

Frank stood spellbound.

While the ghastly forms, contorted and twisted into every possible shape, went sailing about the cabin.

Some of them had already begun to fall into dissolution. The ultimate end of all was assured.

But Frank soon regained his composure.

His momentary dread of the corpses passed away, and he now thought himself of looking for the galleon's gold.

That this was really the Donna Veneta he felt assured.

After some moments he steeled his nerves and essayed to cross the cabin.

Horrors!

The hideous corpses came rushing about him, striking him and brushing by in unwelcome contact.

For an instant, overcome with the horror of the moment, Frank struck out right and left fighting the corpses away.

Thus he had made his way half across the cabin floor when a strange thing happened.

There was a sudden terrific shock, he was hurled upon his face, and for a few seconds was stunned.

When he came to he regained his feet and started for the cabin stairs. His one thought was that something terrible had happened.

To find out what this was from Barney and Clifford was his first purpose.

He sprang up the stairs but came to a sudden halt.

His progress was barred. His head struck the hatch above. It was closed.

For a moment Frank was astounded. Then he essayed to lift the hatch.

He pressed his weight against it time and again. But each time it refused to yield.

CHAPTER IX. THE GALLEON'S GOLD.

WHAT did it mean?

He tried to clear his befogged mind and think clearly on the subject, but the result was that he was always more perplexed.

He pounded on the hatch, and would have shouted to Barney and Clifford had he been sure that they would hear him.

If they were still outside, they certainly must be aware that the hatch was closed.

Why, then, did they not lift it? Why should they for so long allow it to remain closed?

Then a chilling thought came to Frank.

He gasped and sank down upon the cabin stairs.

"My soul! Can it be possible?" he muttered. "Am I buried alive?"

He remembered the explosion or shock which had flung him upon his face!

What did it mean?

Had something happened above to seal the fate of his friends as well as his own? Yet he could not imagine what that happening could be.

"I will not believe it," he muttered. "I will wait. They will yet come to my rescue."

Time passed slowly enough.

Yet the rescue did not come.

However, Frank did not give up home and fresh interest was aroused in his mind in the galleon's gold.

"Why waste my time," he thought, "if anything has happened they will dig me out in good time. I am not afraid of that."

With which consoling reflection, he set out to find the galleon's gold. Once more he started across the cabin floor.

He gained a door on the opposite side and pushed against it. It opened and he walked in.

Again the hideous corpses attacked him. But he heeded them not. Into a second cabin he passed.

One happy state of affairs he noticed. There were no dead bodies in the place.

He closed the door carefully behind him; then he looked about the place.

It was evidently the captain's cabin; everything was in a remarkable state of preservation.

He passed along to the captain's table. The sextant, quadrant box, compass and globe were yet there; but the charts and maps and all papers had dissolved.

This was to be regretted, as the true history of the Donna Veneta might never be known.

But Frank was looking for the galleon's gold.

He opened the doors of the desk; they were filled with miscellaneous articles. There were a few gold and silver coins and a number of jewels.

Frank passed on from the captain's cabin into the forward cabin. This was also deserted. But everything in the place seemed in a perfect state of preservation.

The young inventor did not waste much time here.

He looked curiously at some articles of bric-a-brac which had withstood the rack of time. Some of them were of value, and he decided to have them removed to the Dolphin.

So interested did he become in his research that he became quite oblivious of the fact that he was imprisoned alive in a sunken ship.

Beyond this cabin there was the forecabin. This contained no material of value, but the seamen's chests were in some cases open and the contents thrown carelessly about, just as their owners had left them.

Frank spent but little time in the forecabin.

Then he went below into the hold. Here were the stores which the Spaniards had placed aboard the Veneta for her long cruise.

There were casks of wine, rich old Madeira, of priceless value, how could it be brought to the light of day. Great barrels of pork and ship biscuits, and other matters too numerous for specific mention.

Through the hold Frank went to the magazine. Here was a goodly store of powder and ball. Next was the gun-room with many stands of small arms of the ancient firelock pattern.

"Well," muttered the young inventor, after all this, "where is the princely fortune of gold which is supposed to be contained in this vessel? Surely it must be hid away in some secret part of the ship, if it exists at all."

And yet he saw no reason for doubting its existence. He remembered that the treasure rooms aboard these old galleons were generally secret chambers.

In that case he must look for such; with which recollection he began examining the partitions and bulkheads.

It seemed more logical to him that the treasure chamber should be contiguous to the captain's room.

So he went thither.

And examining the wainscoting thoroughly, he found that there existed quite a large space between that and the main cabin.

"I see," he muttered; "this is where the treasure room is located. But now how can entrance to it be obtained?"

This was a question, but Frank fell to closely searching the surface of the wainscoting.

This had a speedy result.

He discovered a slender crack which he felt sure outlined a door. He followed it with his finger until he came to a tiny button set in the wood.

On this he pressed.

The result was quickly apparent.

A section of the wainscoting moved back. Time had not affected the locks and springs.

A square chamber was revealed beyond.

Frank flashed his electric light into it. Then he entered.

The treasure chamber was about eight by ten feet square, but it was half filled with metal chests piled one upon the other.

These were all locked, and resisted the strongest efforts of the young inventor.

But they were extremely heavy, and he doubted not but that they contained gold or silver coin.

That this was the treasure chamber of the vessel he made sure by the discovery of a rude reckoning in Spanish scratched upon a brass tablet with a bodkin of steel.

Each chest had one of these plates affixed to it, and they announced the contents of each in pesos.

Frank counted the chests and making an average, estimated the fortune at the enormous sum of two million dollars.

"What will Clifford and Hartley say?" he thought; "surely it will be a surprise to them."

Then a chill struck him.

He remembered his position and the peculiar shock which he had experienced some while before.

"I wonder if they have got the hatch open yet?" he mused.

With which reflection he decided to go back and see. Accordingly he opened the door to the main cabin.

And as he did so he shivered at the ordeal before him.

There were the hideous array of corpses yet swinging round the circle. They grinned at him in a fiendish way and then made a dash at him.

Frank, in spite of himself, gave a shriek and slammed the door after him. Then he hurled the frightful cadavers from him.

Many of them had melted away into ashes upon the cabin floor, but others seemed to hold their own.

"Ugh!" muttered the young inventor. "I can't say that I like this."

However, he made his way across the cabin to the stairway. Up this he clambered.

He put his hand up. The hatch was still down.

He tried to force it upward.

It would not yield.

For a moment a stunned feeling came over Frank. He sank down upon the stairs and an awful reflection came over him.

"They have deserted me!" he muttered. "My God, they have left me to die!"

Imprisoned forever in that sunken vessel with the corpses of two hundred years ago for companions!

Truly it was an awful situation! What could he do?

Frank Reade, Jr., was a brave young man. But in spite of this, he was almost unnerved by the reflection.

The temptation was strong upon him to end the affair then and there. Why make the end a lingering one?

All sorts of tragic fancies forced themselves upon him.

Dead to the world, buried alive, destined never to see God's sunlight and beautiful day again.

What a horrible thought.

In his very agony of spirit he wailed.

"God help me! Is there no chance for my life? Can I not find my way out of here in some way?"

Then he became calmer. Never were his inventive faculties keener. A sort of desperation was upon him.

"I will find a way out!" he muttered resolutely.

He drew his ax from his belt and began work upon the hatch. But it was of toughest oak and seemed to yield but a little to the keen blade.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT BECAME OF THE DOLPHIN.

BUT what of the others?

What had happened?

Barney and Clifford were holding vigil at the opening to the hatchway. They were waiting eagerly for word from Frank Reade, Jr. All of a sudden there was a blinding flash of brightest light, an awful roar and a shock.

Both men were lifted as if by a catapult and whirled away in surging masses of water.

They had instinctive sense enough to cling to each other through all.

It seemed an interminable length of time that they were tossed and hurled and carried through the water.

Then they sank and once more felt the bed of the ocean beneath them.

They lay upon the sands for some little while.

Then the waters grew calm about them and they recovered themselves. They sat up and looked about.

The locality did not greatly differ from the one they had left.

It was the same expanse of sand and coral reef.

Their helmet lights made a limited circle of radiance about them. Beyond that all was darkness.

"Well," exclaimed Clifford, placing his helmet against Barney's, "what does this mean?"

"Shure, sor, it beats me. I'm afther thinkin' somethin' blew up!"

"Oh, yes, there was an explosion."

"Shure, sor!"

"But what was it?"

"I'm sthuck, sor!"

"Could it have been the Dolphin?"

Barney shook his head.

"I'll niver believe that, sor. No, it's my opinion that thim omadhouns av the Aurelian had the instrumentality av it all."

Clifford gave a start.

"I have it!" he cried.

"Pwhat, sor?"

"It is the work of Parker. He dropped a torpedo down upon us. It's a wonder that it did not kill us. If his aim had been true we should now be dead!"

The Celt looked his horror.

"Shure, an' pwhat av it struck the Dolphin?"

"I do not think it fell in that locality," declared Clifford, "though I have no doubt the Dolphin felt the shock somewhat."

Then Barney gave a wild start.

"But shure, sor, it's fools we are to be here an' leave Mither Frank phwere he is."

"That is right," agreed Clifford. "We must go and look for him."

With which they got upon their feet and looked about them.

Nothing was to be seen of the Dolphin or her search-light. All was gloom about them.

But beyond the circle of their helmet lamps Clifford saw a white reef.

It looked familiar to him.

"The sunken galleon is on the other side of that," he said; "the shock of the explosion carried us over here."

"All roight, sor!" cried Barney, with alacrity.

So they set out for the reef. Below was a sandy plain, and they fancied they could see the excavation over the galleon's deck.

But when they reached the spot, it was not there. Nor was there anything at all familiar in the surroundings.

"Well," muttered Clifford. "I can't say that I like this. Let us look on further."

And this they proceeded to do.

From one spot to another they wandered. But each grew less familiar and the more strongly impressed the fact upon them that they were lost.

Lost at the bottom of the sea!

Hundreds of fathoms from the surface in very mid-ocean. What an awful reflection.

It held the two men aghast. Nothing but despair and death hung over them like a grim pall.

Meanwhile what of the Dolphin and Pomp and Hartley?

At the moment that the torpedo exploded, Pomp was adjusting the search-light, and Hartley was watching the operations of his friends in digging for the galleon.

"They have found it, Pomp," he cried; "and Frank has gone down into it."

"Golly! I done hope nuffin happen to him down dere!" cried the coon. "I see dreful afear'd ob gittin' in some place laike dat whar yo' never kin git out!"

"I share your fears, Pomp," said Hartley. "Yet we must admit that Frank knows his business well."

"Fo' suah, sah!"

The words were barely out of Pomp's lips when he saw a distant object come sliding down through the water.

"Wha' am dat?" he muttered, but said no more.

The instant the object touched the bed of the sea, there was a fearful blinding flash, an awful boom and shock.

Then all was chaos and oblivion for a time.

The Dolphin was picked up as if it was a bubble, and hurled through the waters most violently.

It seemed as if it would never cease whirling, when there was a crash and a shock. Then Pomp found himself standing on his head in a corner of the cabin, and Hartley was jammed into another corner.

It was some moments before either recovered breath enough to speak.

Then suddenly the electric lights were paled by the light of day. Both glanced through the windows, and saw that they were on the surface of the sea.

The Aurelian was seen some distance away.

"Jemina!" exclaimed Hartley, as he gained his feet, "what on earth happened to us?"

"Golly, dat am jes' wha' I was finkin'!" cried Pomp.

Then rubbing their bruises, they looked about to see what harm had been done.

But the boat was apparently uninjured, and floated lightly on the rolling waves.

But certainly something had happened to bring the boat to the surface in such a startling manner.

What this was Hartley tried to think. Then all came to him.

"By the north star!" he cried, "that was a torpedo those rascals exploded, thinking to annihilate us!"

"A topedol!" exclaimed Pomp. "Den it am berry lucky dat we was not blowed up!"

"Indeed it was!" exclaimed Hartley. "I wish I had a gun; I'd sink their infernal craft!"

"Hi, dar—look out!" yelled Pomp. "Dey hab got a gun fo' suah!"

A puff of smoke leaped from the side of the Aurelian. There was a distant boom, and a shot passed not a foot above the vessel's rail.

The aim was not so close as it would be next time, and Hartley knew it.

"Look out, Pomp!" he cried, "they mean to sink us! Send her to the bottom again!"

"Golly, dat am jes' wha' I will do!" cried the darky.

He sprang to the key board. He swung the tank lever about. But the boat did not sink.

The darky was astounded. A shade of dismay crept across his face.

"Fo' de lan's sake!" he muttered. "Wha' am de mattah? Am anyfing bruk?"

"Mercy on us?" cried Hartley; "don't say that, Pomp! What will become of Frank and the others?"

It was a fearful reflection.

Boom!

Another shot came within an inch of taking away the bow of the submarine boat.

"They are a set of pirates and murderers!" cried Hartley, angrily; "show them no mercy!"

"Massy Lordy! It don' look as if we was gwine fo' to hab de chance!" declared the coon.

"Well, don't expose the boat any longer to the shots. We must at least get out of here!"

"Yo' am right, sah! Yer goes!"

The coon put on speed and sped beyond range of the Aurelian's gun. Then Pomp applied himself to the all important matter of repairing the boat.

Pomp was not as thorough a mechanic as Barney, yet he knew something of the mechanism of the Dolphin. He worked zealously.

He found eventually that the shock had dislodged a piece of steel plating in the bulkhead, which had fallen into the cogs of the tank trucks and so obstructed them.

To remove this was a matter of no little effort and time.

It required six hours of active work to pat the damaged trucks back into good shape.

All this while the Aurelian had been sending down divers as Hartley saw through his glass.

Whether they had discovered the treasure or not was a question.

If they had, then there must have been some sort of an encounter, and Pomp and Hartley feared for the safety of their friends.

Pomp worked like a Trojan to get the boat into working order again, for he knew the importance of at once going to the rescue of the lost ones.

But of a sudden the Aurelian seemed to be pulling up anchor and getting ready to sail way.

The cause of this move was for a time a mystery to Pomp and Hartley.

But the captain chanced to glance at the horizon, and cried:

"On my word, mate, I see the reason for it. Look yonder!"

Up from the southern horizon great masses of yellow clouds were piling up.

The sky had a brassy look, and the sea was lead like.

"A storm, sah!"

"Yes," cried the captain; "it is a storm coming up, and they mean to shift their position. Probably they will run for the protection of some cay near here. There is one on the western sea line. It is, I think, Miller's Cay."

"Dat am berry funny!" muttered Pomp, shaking his head; "but it gibs us a good chance."

"You are right! How is the tank?"

"A'right now, sah! I done fink we can go to the bottom berry quick, sah."

"Good!"

Pomp closed the doors, and then went into the pilot house. He pressed the tank lever.

At once the boat began to sink.

Down she went steadily, and Pomp, flashing the search-light, finally saw the bottom.

Under the sea the Dolphin had nothing to fear from the hurricane. This was her advantage over the Aurelian.

It was now in order to find the missing men of the crew. What their fate was could only be guessed.

But Pomp sent the submarine boat forward at full speed. In a very few moments she was in the vicinity of the spot from which she had been driven by the explosion of the bomb.

But the exact location did not seem easy to find.

"Dat am berry funny!" declared Pomp, after cruising aimlessly about for a while. "Wherebber can dey hab 'em? Whar am dat sunken ship?"

A sharp spasmodic cry suddenly escaped Hartley's lips and he said, hoarsely:

"My soul! Look yonder! What is that?"

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK'S ADVENTURES.

FRANK READE, JR., left in the cabin of the sunken galleon was certainly in a position which it is hardly possible for one to adequately realize.

All hope seemed lost.

The failure of his friends to return or open the hatch had satisfied him that their fate was sealed.

His one aim now was to get out of the galleon's cabin.

So he rained blow after blow with his ax upon the closed hatch. But it seemed obdurate.

Above one layer of planks was another.

This was discouraging.

Yet he kept on and after a long period of fatiguing work actually succeeded in cutting a hole through the hatch.

But as he did so his ax sunk into some substance which moved and fell in some quantity. It was sand.

"Mercy!" muttered the despair stricken man, "it is true that the sand has again covered the deck up."

In this event his efforts to dig his way out would be futile.

He was weary and exhausted. In fact, he had barely strength enough left to creep down the ladder.

A strange drowsiness came over him. He could not resist it.

He crept back to the captain's cabin and sank down upon a couch. Almost instantly he was asleep.

How long he slept he never knew.

When he awoke he started up with a queer sense of his surroundings. In a few moments, however, memory supplied the blank.

Then he looked about him in a hopeless way.

He wondered if rescue had yet come and arose to open the door into the main cabin.

As he did so he was startled at an unexpected sight.

The hatch was open and a man's body was just sliding down through it.

"Saved!" gasped the imprisoned man, with a wild thrill. Then he ceased to speak.

He stood like one overcome with horror.

"On my word," he finally managed to mutter, "fate has played it into Parker's hands after all."

For it required no second glance for him to see that the new-comer was one of the Aurelian's crew.

The peculiar fit of his diving suit and the life lines were evidence of this.

For a moment Frank knew not what to do.

Should he face the new-comers and give them battle? He could hardly hope to successfully meet such odds.

What should he do?

In lieu of a better move he stepped behind the captain's big desk. Through an orifice in the scrolled frame he could see and not be seen.

Down into the main cabin came four of the Aurelian's men.

They were held at bay for some moments by the ghostly crew of the Veneta. But the love of gold overcame all their scruples finally and they came across to the door of the captain's room.

They stepped inside, and as Frank had done before them, carefully examined everything.

Fortunately Frank had closed the door to the treasure vault; they did not find this.

But they came up to the captain's desk and proceeded to ransack it. Frank watched them intently.

What should he do? In the very indecision of the moment, the divers from the Aurelian moved away.

They passed from the captain's cabin into the forward cabin; for a moment Frank hesitated.

It would have been an easy matter for him to have reached out and cut the life lines of his foes.

But he shrank from such an act of murder with repugnance.

His one purpose was to reach the gangway and get out of the hold of the vessel as soon as possible.

It seemed to him that his best move was to regain the deck of the submarine boat and rejoin his friends as soon as possible.

So, when the divers had passed from the captain's cabin into the main cabin, he slipped out from his concealment and started for the gangway.

Fatal move!

One of the Aurelian's men turned just in time to see him. Instantly the fellow raised his ax and hurled it at Frank.

It was at close range, and the blunt head of it struck the young inventor's helmet.

The shock was sufficient to instantly deprive him of his senses.

He fell like a log.

In a moment his captors were upon him. One of them fiercely raised his ax to brain the defenseless man.

But another caught his arm, and thrusting his helmet against his, shouted:

"Avast there, Parker! Don't kill him yet!"

"Why not, Warren? Let go of my arm! There is no reason why I should spare his life!"

"Yes, there is!"

"What is it?"

"It is likely that he can give us information in regard to the galleon's gold. At any rate do not kill him yet, messmate."

Captain Warren's admonition had its effect upon Gilbert Parker. The would-be murderer lowered his ax.

"All right, Warren," he said; "perhaps you're right after all."

Frank's body was lifted up, and he was placed upon a rotting couch near. He was already regaining his consciousness.

But at this moment Warren gave a start. He placed his helmet to Parker's and shouted:

"A danger signal from above!"

"What is it?"

"Wait until I can learn."

Warren was enabled to speak through his tube with those on the Aurelian's deck.

Presently he turned to Parker and said:

"A hurricane is coming up. Mate Clark has already got the anchor under way, and has recalled our boat."

"Then we have got to give up the search for now?"

"Yes."

"But how can we escape the hurricane?"

"Make for Miller's Cay, which is within sight of the ship's mast-head. We can then return and reclaim the galleon's gold."

The diving lines did not proceed from the Aurelian's deck, but from a small launch which was moored at some little distance from the ship.

So when the crew of the Dolphin saw the Aurelian weigh anchor the divers were not aboard her, nor did they get aboard until some-while later.

A consultation was held as to what it was best to do with their captive.

"Take off his weights and take him aboard with us," cried Parker.

"No!" objected Warren.

"Why not?"

"I have a better plan."

"Ah, what is it?"

"Leave him here. Batten down the hatches and let him stay until we return. Bind him so that he cannot move!"

"Capital!" cried Parker. "We can decide what else to do with him when we return!"

"Exactly?"

This move decided upon, no time was lost in executing it.

Frank was quickly bound hand and foot. Then he was left lying upon his back in the main cabin, with the floating corpses all about him.

His captors disappeared up the stairway and he was left alone.

He heard them batten down the hatch and cover it over with sand. Then he groaned:

"Oh, my soul! I am truly lost. The end of this can only be death."

The sharp cry uttered by Hartley at the close of a preceding chapter while he and Pomp were sailing blindly about in the deep sea with the Dolphin was well warranted.

Afar in the distance the captain saw a faint star of light.

It was not in the search-light's path, and consequently easily seen. Pomp also saw it.

"What is that?"

"Massy Lordy!" gasped Pomp. "Wha' am it but de helmet lamp ob some one ob our men!"

"It must be!" cried Hartley, hopefully, "it can be nothing else."

"Yo' am right!"

"Turn the search-light onto it!"

No time was lost in this.

A sharp cry of joy burst from the lips of each. The distant figure of a man was seen.

"Hurrah!" cried Hartley, "by the North Star if that isn't one of our men. We shall save him!"

"Golly! dat am good luck!" cried Pomp, joyfully.

It was the turning of the search light full upon them that had caused Barney and Clifford such a thrill of surprise as was depicted at the close of a preceding chapter.

When the remote chance of a reunion was fully considered this could be deemed nothing short of miraculous.

The submarine voyagers certainly had good reason to congratulate themselves.

The submarine boat now bore down upon the two lost voyagers.

"Thank God, Barney, we are saved!" cried Clifford, joyfully: "fate is with us!"

"Begorra, we'll be on deck yet, be the sowl av Pat Murphy!" cried Barney. "Shure, it's a bit av luck fer us!"

Nearer drew the submarine boat. In a short while it loomed up near at hand.

Then the two lost men clambered aboard.

They were quickly in the cabin, and were fairly embraced by Pomp and Hartley.

Mutual congratulations followed, and then all was fully explained.

After both stories were told, Barney cried:

"Begorra, plawat do yez thunk has happened to Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"Golly, I done flink yo' ought to know de mos' about dat!" cried Pomp.

"Be me sowl, we left him in the cabin av the sunken ship!"

All looked at each other.

"Then he must be there yet!" said Clifford.

"Of course," agreed Hartley. "God grant no harm has come to him!"

"I cannot see why it should," said Clifford. "At least our best move is to go right back there and find him. There is no doubt but that we shall find him all right, unless——"

The same thought crossed the minds of all in that moment. They remembered the Aurelian's men and the opportunity they had.

If they had come upon Frank and made him a prisoner, there was no telling what the villain Parker might do with him.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "if dey hab done Marse Frank any harm dey bettah say dere prayers, fo' dey will pay fo' it as suah as I is a bo'n niggah."

"That is right, Pomp," declared Clifford. "We are all with you to a man. It shall be so. But we will continue to hope that he is all right."

"Yas, sah!"

At once preparations were made for resuming the search for the sunken galleon.

It was not so very difficult to locate her.

Bearings were obtained and then the Dolphin sailed down for the spot. As she drew nearer the reef nothing was seen of the Aurelian's divers.

But traces of their visit were discovered.

In the sand there were spades and other tools left by them. This would seem to be evidence that they meant to return.

"On me worrud as a gentleman," cried Barney. "I believe they've done harrum to Mистер Frank."

"Let us hope we will find him in the galleon's cabin," said Clifford.

"Anchor the boat, boys."

The Dolphin was quickly set down and anchored. Then lots were drawn to see who was to be the favored ones to visit the galleon.

It fell to Hartley and Pomp. This seemed just enough as they had previously remained aboard the Dolphin.

"All right," cried Clifford. "I fud no fault. Only bring Frank back with you."

"Golly! we done do dat if we can yo' bet," cried the darky.

In a few moments they had donned their diving suits and left the Dolphin. They crossed the intervening distance to the deck of the galleon.

The sand had been excavated, and the hatch was open.

One moment the two explorers paused at the head of the cabin stairs.

Then Hartley said:

"Follow me, Pomp!"

"A'right, sah!"

Down the stairs they went. The sight which they met appalled them.

The floating corpses were more than Pomp could stand.

If there was one thing the darky had a horror of it was a corpse.

"Massy Lordy!" he groaned; "de debbil am down dere fo' shuah! He done git dis chile!"

"Nonsense!" cried Hartley, impatiently. "Come along, you black rascal!"

But no amount of persuasion could induce Pomp to enter the dead men's cabin.

Hartley gave up the task.

"Well," he said, "I must go alone. Keep guard at the hatchway then."

"I do dat," agreed Pomp.

Down into the cabin Hartley went. He pushed the floating bodies aside.

He passed from one part of the ship to another. There were marks of a former visit plain enough.

But the object of his quest—Frank Reade, Jr.—could not be found.

There was no trace of him to be found anywhere.

To the reader this will seem strange, as we left him securely bound and the hatches closed by the departing divers of the Aurelian.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

FRANK READE, JR., left bound hand and foot upon the floor of the main cabin of the Donna Veneta, was in by no means a happy frame of mind.

He was always clear grit and never given to despair.

Yet at that moment his case looked black and hopeless enough.

He lay for some while after the departure of his captors without making a move of any kind.

The other occupants of the cabin were respectful enough. Occasionally one of the dead buccaneers would lazily change his position, or catching a current, float across the cabin.

At such times the young inventor could not avoid a chill of horror, so ghostly and supernatural did the buccaneers look.

Some time elapsed.

It seemed an age to Frank.

He speculated upon his chances in a methodical sort of way and gave himself up to somewhat morbid reflection.

After all, his worst fate could only be death. It must come to him sometime. Drowning was, after all, not the worst form.

Again the suicidal mania threatened him. Especially was this the case when he reckoned the hopelessness of his position.

After a time, however, reaction was bound to set in.

Life never seemed to have a more rosy hue. It would seem a transition into paradise to reach the upper world.

With this came a desperate sort of hope.

Why not make a supreme effort?

It could do no worse than fail. Once his mind was made up there was no faltering.

He began work on his bonds. He writhed and twisted for some while. The water had swollen the ropes, but it had also weakened the strands.

He rolled over and over until he reached the door of the captain's cabin. Here his gaze fell upon an object which gave him a thrill.

It was an ax.

It had been dropped there by one of the divers; at once Frank saw his opportunity.

He rolled over to it in such a manner as to press his bonds against its keen edge.

Again and again he pressed the cords against the keen blade; one by one the strands snapped.

Finally the last one was cut; Frank experienced a thrill.

The rest was easy.

He had the use of his hands now, and with the blade of the ax he cut the other bonds.

He scrambled to his feet a free man; for a moment he was undecided how to act.

His impulse was to get out of the cabin of the galleon; but how could this be done?

The hatch had been battened down by the Aurelian's divers when they went away. Could he hope to break it open?

He could at least try.

He ascended the stairs and dealt the hatch a blow. Joy! it yielded, and with a great effort he forced it open.

He pushed away the sand and emerged at last from the prison he had occupied so long.

He examined his generator.

There were chemicals enough in it to last full forty-eight hours longer.

"Perhaps by that time they will return for me," he reflected. "At least I will cling to hope."

He looked about him.

There was no sign of the submarine boat or of the Aurelian's men in the vicinity. He was in a quandary as to what it was best to do.

While in this state of doubt he wandered away from the spot for some ways.

Again a strange drowsiness came upon him. He could not help but yield to it.

He waited for a time fighting off the sensation. Then selecting a secluded spot under the reef, he sank down.

In a few moments he was sound asleep. The water surged about his prostrate form, little fishes came and peered in at the windows of his helmet.

But nothing of this kind woke him. How long he slept he knew not.

But when he woke up all was a glare of light about him. He was some while collecting his scattered senses.

Then he arose and looked about him. His whole being thrilled.

"Saved!" he gasped.

It was no dream. Not fifty yards distant was the submarine boat, Dolphin.

Frank at once started for it. He reached its side and clambered over the rail.

He entered the vestibule and exhausted it of water. Then he removed his helmet and stepped into the cabin.

The effect was startling.

Clifford sat by a table looking over some maps. Barney was engaged in the pilot house.

Clifford started up with a gasping cry:

"Heaven preserve us!" he shouted, "it is Frank Reade, Jr."

Frank was wildly embraced by both.

"Be the sowl av Pat Murphy's cow, I'm happy onct more," cried Barney, turning somersaults across the cabin.

"But—how on earth did you get here, Frank!" cried Clifford.

"We had given you up."

"I have had quite an experience," said Frank, with a smile, "but where are the others?"

"They are in the cabin of the galleon."

"But—what has become of the Aurelian?"

"Driven away by a gale. The coast is clear. Before she can return we can recover the Donna Veneta's treasure and be off."

"You are right."

Then Frank told his story.

Clifford was more than delighted when he learned of the amount of the galleon's treasure.

"We will cheat old Parker out of it after all," he cried, wildly.

"That is to pay the old scamp for his rascality!"

"You are right," said Frank, and began to put on his helmet.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going down to join Hartley and Pomp, and help them get the chests of gold out."

"Good! What assistance can we be?"

"Keep watch for us and manipulate the search-light to our advantage."

"I will do that!"

Frank now left the Dolphin. He slid over the rail and started for the galleon's hatch.

Reaching it, he began to descend, but before he reached the bottom of the stair-case, a form slid forward and embraced him.

"Massy Lordy, if it ain' Marse Frank. Whereber you cum from, sah?"

It was Pomp.

It is useless to dwell upon that reunion. It was a happy meeting.

It did not take long for them to exchange experiences. Then Hartley said:

"So the Aurelian was driven away by the hurricane, eh? Well, she will return, you may be sure. Old Gilbert Parker is a genuine bull-dog."

"Let him return," said Frank. "We will deal with him next

time as he desrrves. It is true that he would have murdered the whole of us."

"Golly, dat am right!" cried Pomp. "I done fink we bettah get dat gold abo'd de Dolphin an' start fo' home."

"That is just what we will do," agreed Frank.

So they went to work at once hoisting the chests of gold out of the Donna Veneta's hold.

In a short while they were all piled up on the sands outside.

Then they were easily transported aboard the Dolphin. The galleon's hatch was then closed, and it was left with its ghastly occupants to remain forever buried at the bottom of the Honduras Gulf.

There seemed no reason now for lingering in the vicinity.

But Frank had some curiosity to know what was the fate of the Aurelian, so he sent the Dolphin away toward the Miller's Cay in quest of her.

The hurricane had passed, yet Frank did not deem it advisable to go to the surface. So the Dolphin pursued her way under water.

When at a point which Hartley declared was not two miles from the Cay, it was decided to go to the surface.

Up went the Dolphin; then as she rose above the waves, every eye scanned the watery waste for a sail.

No sail was in sight, but not half a mile to windward a wreck drifted.

"Mercy on us!" cried Frank. "Can it be the Aurelian?"

The submarine boat ran nearer to the wreck. Then upon the stern was read the name "Aurelian."

She was a shattered, water-logged hulk. It was not likely that she could long keep above the waters.

Not a sign of her crew was visible; she was hailed repeatedly but no answer came back. Even as the voyagers were gazing at her she took a sudden plunge and went down.

After the last ripples had died away upon the spot where she disappeared, Frank turned the Dolphin's head homeward.

Nothing was ever seen again of Gilbert Parker, of Captain Warren, or any of the Aurelian's crew. It was safe to say that all had met a deserving fate in the waters of the Gulf of Honduras.

Homeward bound was the Dolphin with her Spanish gold. In every way the cruise had been a success.

Readstown was safely reached at last. Then followed a division of the treasure. It made all rich enough.

Clifford and Hartley returned to their homes happy men. Frank Reade, Jr., went back to his shops and his plans.

Barney and Pomp resumed their duties as of yore, waiting for the moment when Frank should be impelled to go off on another cruise to some wonderful part of the world. Until such time we will bid the reader a kind adieu.

[THE END.]

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